

COLLECTIVES IN SPAIN

a small
anthology

Black Dog
Press

3 25p e40cents



COLLECTIVES IN SPAIN

A SMALL ANTHOLOGY

CONTENTS

The Spanish Collectives.....	George Woodcock....	I
Collectives in Spain.....	Gaston Leval.....	9
Principles of the Collective.....	Gaston Leval.....	29
The Village of Alcora.....	H.E. Kaminski.....	47
The Collectivised Industries.....	Vernon Richards...	53
From an interview with Buenaventura Durruti.....		63

All of these extracts have been published previously, and each is headed with the original source, which should be obtainable through a library.

Black Dog Press c/o 84a Whitechapel High Str., London

E. I., England.

THE SPANISH COLLECTIVES

(Chapter 4 from "The Basis of Communal Living", by George Woodcock)

No survey of the community as a means of social change would be complete without mentioning the village communities which were formed in Spain during the early days of the Spanish civil war of 1936. The village community has survived in many Spanish districts in a more complete form than anywhere else in Europe, and throughout the peasant areas of Spain the tradition of communal work and ownership has been preserved from past ages.

Right up to 1936, many of the village communities existed in a highly developed form, particularly in Catalonia and the Pyrenees. In his book, 'The Spanish Labyrinth', Gerald Brenan pays considerable attention to such villages, and the following passage from his book gives an idea of the extent and complexity of some of these communities.

'Among the valleys of the Pyrenees are to be found communities of shepherds who own all the pasture

lands and run their affairs on similar lines. In one of these, described by John Langdon Davies in his book 'Behind the Barricades', all the land except for the houses and gardens belonged to the village: the doctor, barber, blacksmith, veterinary surgeon and chemist's shop were maintained by the municipality, seeds were distributed free every year, there was a co-operative store and, to crown everything, the peasants still wore their eighteenth-century clothes...

'These comunidades de pasto are not, however, confined to the Pyrenees; they exist in Caceres and in the Asturian highlands. The village of Case, for example, which has 15,000 inhabitants, has 20,000 head of cattle all owned collectively and no arable land at all. But one must go to Catalonia if one wishes to see the greatest extension of communal undertakings. Many of these are industrial, such as the very old one at Bagur for making nets. Others are fishing communities, and here I cannot do better than quote John Langdon Davies' description of one of these called Port de la Selva, in his book 'Behind the Barricades'. His observations were made in 1936, shortly before the Civil War broke out, and he has kindly allowed me to read the little pamphlet which he brought back to England giving the rules of the community.

'The village was run by a fishermen's co-operative. They owned the nets, the boats, the curing factory, the store house, the refrigerating plant, all

the shops, the transport lorries, the olive groves and the assembly rooms. They had developed the posito, or municipal credit fund possessed by every village in Spain, into an insurance against death, accident and loss of boats. They coined their own money. They imposed fines for wrangling, for speaking badly of the Society, for insults, for any action opposed to morality and decorum. According to Article 6 of their rules, the diversion of the members would consist in dances and their expansion in theatre and movie shows, literary and scientific evenings and in lectures on farming and pisciculture.'

Some of the rules of the last community may not be entirely anarchistic, but the generally libertarian basis of its structure is evident.

The tradition of past forms of community life, and the example of existing instances has left a deep impression on those Spaniards who have lost such institutions, and the great ambition of the poor peasants of such areas as Andalusia has always been to get rid of their landlords and run the affairs of their village and its lands as a community of free and equal cultivators. For the past eighty years this desire has been encouraged by the anarchists and the C.N.T., which was very strong among the peasants of Andalusia. In spite of their syndicalist theories, when they come down to practical details of organisation, the

Spaniards seem always to have placed more value on the commune as an integrated local unit than on the nation-wide syndicate, and this is a sound tendency which is undoubtedly closely connected with the old Spanish traditions of village community.

When the Spanish civil war began in 1936, the first action of the peasants and the town workers in Catalonia was to dispossess the land and factory owners, and take over the means of production for themselves. As the Fascists retreated in the early days of the war, a similar development took place in Aragon, and everywhere the peasants did not merely content themselves with taking over the land, but also established village communities which sought to integrate the satisfaction of the needs of all the villagers. These new communities became very similar in structure to such already existing examples as that at Port de Selva, and it was evident that in establishing them the Spanish peasants were not merely performing an act of revolutionary expropriation, but also returning to a traditional and natural social life which had existed before a property and landlord system was imposed, and thus fulfilling a long-felt desire for the restitution of ancient rights. For these Spanish peasants it was something very like a literal return to a golden age of natural social relations.

The new community villages immediately set to work to arrange their life to the best possible advantage of all the peasants. The land was pooled, and cultivation proceeded

in common. As the villages returned to communal life in July, their first task was to reap the grain of the vanished landowners. This was done co-operatively, and then the grain was, for the most part, handed to a committee entrusted with the task of distributing it fairly among all the inhabitants according to needs, and exchanging the surplus for manufactured goods, such as implements and clothes and shoes for the needy.

The work on the collectivised lands then proceeded, and co-ordination was ensured by the formation of committees to organise various branches of the work. Each family was given a piece of land to grow his own vegetables, etc., for immediate consumption; and the proceeds of the crops and herds distributed among the inhabitants according to needs or exchanged for goods from outside for which there was need. A whole series of negotiations between the peasants and the town workers arose, in which the communes acted on behalf of the peasants in conducting the negotiations for exchange.

A wide modernisation of agricultural methods took place. The communes bought seed, fertilisers and implements which the individual peasants had never been able to afford, and within a year tractors began to appear in villages which up to then had still used the ploughing methods of the Dark Ages. The peasants eagerly sought knowledge on new methods of cultivating

and breeding. Waste land was broken up, new orchards were planted, and considerable increases in production and in herds were obtained in the short life of these village communes.

The social life of the villages was conducted on a basis of communal services, with respect for individual privacy. The peasants retained their own houses and gardens, cooked and fed in private, etc. Even the wishes of the few who wanted to cultivate land individually and not join the collective scheme were respected. Many villages abolished the use of money, substituting the distribution of goods according to need. Others ran a system of local money-tokens, but, unlike those envisaged by Robert Owen, which were based on hours of work, these were generally based on need, a family receiving proportionately higher than a single man, even though the actual production of goods might be equal. In addition, the communes undertook the care of all those who could not work. The aged, the sick and the disabled received the same as anybody else, and care was arranged for them. The best houses vacated by landlords were turned into homes for the old and sick, while the communes provided doctors and dispensaries. Everywhere schools were opened, in many villages for the first time, and a beginning was made, not only in teaching the children, but also in ending the illiteracy of the adults which was the legacy of

centuries of governmental and ecclesiastical obscurantism. The school teachers, like the medical workers, became members of the communes, and were assisted by committees of peasants.

Exactly how many of these communities arose it is now impossible to estimate with accuracy, but in the province of Levante alone there were more than five hundred, and the total must have run into several thousands. Their functioning seems to have been, on the whole, successful, both in gaining practical results in agricultural production and also in avoiding internal strife, while the peasant standard of living showed a substantial betterment during the communal period.

The individual communes established relationships with the other villages surrounding them, so that aid was often given by more prosperous communities to those who, because of the pooriness of their lands or for some other reason, were unable to make as good a start with improvements in their standards of life and methods of production.

Many of the village communities were suppressed forcibly even before Franco's victory. They represented a direct threat to the bourgeois conception of property relationships which was put forward by the Republicans and Communists in the government, who

favoured a return to the "democratic republic" instead of an intensification of the social revolutionary tendencies represented by the communes. When these reactionary elements gained power by their new army and weapons from Russia, one of their first acts, after immobilising the Anarchists and persecuting the POUM, was to destroy the village communities. Lister, the Communist general, was sent to Aragon on an ostensibly military expedition, but spent his time mostly in suppressing the village communities and enforcing a return from communal forms to individual methods of production. There is little doubt that those communes which survived the attention of the Communists were destroyed with the triumph of Franco and the return of the emigre landlords. Whether the old village communities which already existed before the Civil War have survived up to now, we have at present no means of ascertaining.

The Spanish communities were certainly the greatest example in a modern environment of the success of the community village, and undoubtedly in any future social changes in Spain the peasants will do their best to return to this form of life which in so short a time made so great an improvement in their standards of life.

--ooOoo--

COLLECTIVES IN SPAIN

("Collectives in Spain" -- an abridged version of the first part of Gaston Laval's pamphlet 'Social Reconstruction in Spain'.)

Industrial socialization was the first undertaking of the Spanish Revolution, particularly in Barcelona. But obstacles were created from the beginning, which resulted in preventing these experiments from being developed to their logical end. The war was the principal handicap.

But on the other hand, the desire for a complete social revolution was too deep, too rooted in the minds of the working masses for such a consideration to check all the workers. There was another factor to be remembered, namely that a large proportion of employers, directors and shareholders were either self-declared fascists or fascist sympathisers, who longed for a Franco triumph.

Many of these employers fled as soon as they saw that the anti-fascists, inspired by the men of the F.A.I. and the C.N.T. had triumphed. Others were arrested. It was inevitable that the factories and workshops owned by these should be seized and run by the workers. This is in fact

what the workers did.

To the above should be added, the suspect employers who, in order to defend their interests were much more in sympathy with the fascists than with the anti-fascists. One did not expect these men to be eager to construct tanks, aeroplanes, rifles and munitions which were essential for the triumph of those who were fighting their bosom friends. They were not going to do all in their power to develop economic production with the intensity required to guarantee the daily life of anti-fascist Spain. The workers understood this instinctively, and established in almost all workshops, control committees, which had as their aim to keep a watch on the progress in production, and to keep a check on the financial position of the owner of each establishment.

In numerous cases, control was quickly passed from the control committee to the Directive committee, in which the employer was drawn in with the workers and paid the same wage. A number of factories and workshops in Catalonia passed in this way into the hands of the workers who were engaged in them.

Collectivization Decree

It was in view of these facts that the Generalitat - the Government of Catalonia - published the Decree of Collectivization in October, 1936. According to this decree,

the workers were allowed to take over all factories which employed 100 or more workers, besides those with less than 100 workers whose owners were officially recognised as fascists.

The decree which apparently answered the needs of the Catalan workers, and which was received with great joy by the majority of them, was in reality a filching of socialization, for the following reasons:

Firstly: The percentage of workers in factories employing less than 100 was greater than that of the factories employing more than 100 workers, which meant that the greater number of workers were condemned to remain under the system of owner's exploitation.

Secondly: The workers were prevented from being the real masters of the means of production, for the administrative committees which they had to form had their ramifications in the ministry of Economy, to which they had to give an account of their activities. This completely eliminated the syndicates in the work of social reconstruction, and protected a section of the small employers, thus creating a dualism which sooner or later would have to end in the defeat of one of the two parties. But it was a temporary obstacle which the conscientious, responsible elements hoped to settle later.

Thirdly: A system which retained private commerce in its

entirety obliged each workshop, and each factory, to sell that which it produced, independently. The workers then, were competing with one another; were destroying the morale and feeling of solidarity existing among them, and were forced into competition which increased in proportion to the rate at which the economic difficulties became more acute.

The more conscious militant workers were well aware of the dangers, and their reaction was not long in expressing itself. Firstly through their press and by word of mouth, later by Union Meetings. It was understood that if the Union did not take production into their own hands, and did not eliminate the workers' bureaucracy which had been created by the Collectivization Decree, everything accomplished would be invalidated by this irreparable moral and material blow.

Slowly, struggling against the authorities, the Unions from the majority of industrial centres in Catalonia strove to take over the control of the "collectivized" factories and workshops. They partially succeeded. But the partial triumph was the result of many long months of agitation, and during that time, the non-revolutionary forces had eliminated the C.N.T. and the Largo Caballero section from power. The forces opposing socialization and the reactionary counter-offensive became more powerful. On the whole one can state that the action of the Unions was successful. Unfortunately the difficulties were multiplying. When real industrial socialization was beginning, the lack of raw materials was becoming more acute. The textile industry

lacked wool and cotton. The metallurgical workshops lacked steel and the carpenters' shops, timber. And, as if these difficulties were not a sufficiently great problem, the policy of the Government made things even worse.

The Government "took control of the raw material". It was a means of depriving the syndicates of power and of sabotaging their work. Then it "nationalized" the greater part of the industries. This was a pretext to take possession of those which the workers had put into action, and to destroy Socialization.

However, everything did not develop as I have just described. Fortunately a few syndicates in Catalonia took the activities of their respective industries into their own hands from the beginning, disregarding Government orders. And in certain towns outside Catalonia, socialization was put into practice immediately and has shown amazing results.

Barcelona In Barcelona, the Sanitary Syndicate, the Urban Transport, the Water and Gas Syndicates as well as the Public Amusements Syndicate have directed work themselves. The first named and the last were created after the Revolution. They have nevertheless accomplished great work. The Sanitary Syndicate spread throughout Catalonia and organized medical service in

such a way that every village had its doctor.

The railways in Catalonia are an eloquent example of what the workers would have done had they not been paralysed by the concessions made to the bourgeoisie. The three main lines which belonged to three foreign companies constantly competing with one another, were amalgamated to form one company and recently were directed by a central committee of the U.G.T. (General Workers' Union - Socialist) and C.N.T. made up of twelve comrades. There were very few engineers, for most of them were foreigners and had returned to their respective countries. Nevertheless wonderful results were achieved.

Granollers Apart from Barcelona, one can give noteworthy cases of organization. Take the small town of Granollers for instance. Everything was socialized by the Syndicates and the Municipality. And everything worked perfectly. The small workshops disappeared - this took place in hundreds of localities where the workers took over production - and redistribution was rapidly assured by the municipal co-operatives; small business concerns were at first controlled, then eliminated, and the tradespeople given an occupation, either in the co-operative or in other trades.

Castellon If we travel southwards along the Mediterranean coast we reach Castellon. Little or nothing has been said about this town, in spite of the fact that since October, 1936, the metallurgical industry had been entirely in the hands of the Syndicates. The other industries were in the process of being socialized in a similar way. And yet in this town there was no revolutionary syndicalist tradition, but the workers were not lacking in common sense and were deeply conscious of their responsibilities.

Alcoy If we take Alcoy in the Province of Alicante, we have an even more typical example. The workers have long been well organized and no mobilization decree was necessary for the militants. They quickly took over the factories and workshops and organized production in a new way.

Each industry is centralized in the Syndical Administrative Committee. This committee is divided into as many sections as there are principal industries. When an order is received by the sales section it is passed on to the production section whose task it is to decide which workshops are best equipped to produce the required articles. Whilst settling this question they order the required raw materials from the corresponding section. The latter gives instructions to the shops to supply the materials and finally, the buying section receives details of the transaction so that it can

replace the material used.

This summary, which given space, could endlessly be amplified, makes one appreciate the fact that the Spanish Libertarian workers co-ordinate and rationalize production in a much more satisfactory way than Capitalism had done. And I lay special stress on the disappearance of small unhealthy and costly workshops and factories, besides the correct use of machinery for the work most suited to it. Administrative centralization is one of the most outstanding features. One can thus state that wherever collaboration with political parties has not paralysed the workers, the latter were able, even where their syndicates were of only recent formation, to organize production and public services in a highly satisfactory way. There remains to be described the role played by the workers themselves in the administration and industrial management.

The industrial administrative committee is neither an autonomous nor infallible organization. The syndicate still exists, and its central commission controls the ensemble of activities. It is nominated by the general assembly of syndicated workers and has delegates direct from the factories and workshops so as never to lose contact with the workers. In the workshops and factories exist committees elected by an

assembly of workers gathered together on the spot. These committees are responsible for the application of instructions received as regards the conduct of work. In their turn they communicate their observations to the central syndical commission. And at assemblies resolutions are passed concerning both the daily work in the factories and work of the administrative committee.

We are not therefore facing an administrative dictatorship, but rather a functional democracy, in which all specialized works play their roles which have been settled after general examination by the assembly.

* * *

Agrarian Socialization

But it is in agrarian socialization that one must look for the best example of social achievement.

This socialization did not take place simultaneously and completely everywhere at the same time. It was commenced in Aragon, inspired by the Libertarians, then gained ground in Levant and that part of Andalucia which remained in our hands. Finally it extended to the South of Catalonia and in Castille.

The agrarian revolution has inaugurated the

practice of Libertarian right. And it has done it with such results that the Anarchist theorists themselves, those who had always defended the concepts now applied, were amazed, and will never forget the beautiful dream through which they lived.

Let us add that deep social feelings, which characterize the Spanish peasant, were required to put these ideas into practice.

Aragon In about three months, most of the villages of Aragon, some of which were wrested from Fascist hands by the columns led by Durruti and other "undisciplined" guerillas, organized agrarian collectives. One must not confuse the industrial "collectives" carried out under the aegis of the decree mentioned earlier on, and under instructions dictated by the Catalan Government, with those of the peasants. This word "collectives" describes two quite different things.

The mechanism of the formation of the Aragonese collectives, has been generally the same. After having overcome the local authorities when they were fascist, or after having replaced them by Anti-fascist or Revolutionary committees when they were not, an assembly was summoned for all the inhabitants of the locality to decide on their line of action.

One of the first steps was to gather in the crop not only in the fields of the small landowners who still remained, but, what was even more important, also, on the estates of the large landowners all of whom were conservatives and rural "caciques" or chiefs. Groups were organized to reap and thresh the wheat which belonged to these large landowners. Collective work began spontaneously. Then as this wheat could not be given to anyone in particular without being unfair to all it was put under the control of a local committee, for the use of all the inhabitants, either for consumption or for the purpose of exchange for manufactured goods, such as clothes, boots, etc., for those who were most in need.

It was necessary, afterwards, to work the lands of the large landowners. They were generally the most extensive and fertile in the region. The question was again raised before the village assembly. It was then that the "collectivity", if not already definitely constituted - often this had been done at the first meeting - was definitely established.

A delegate for agriculture and stock breeding was nominated (or one for each of these activities when breeding was extensively carried on), one delegate each for local distribution, exchanges, public works, hygiene and education and revolutionary defence. Sometimes there were more; on other occasions less.

Workers groups were then formed. These groups generally were divided into the number of zones into which the municipal territory had been divided, so as more easily to include all kinds of work. The number of zones depends not only on the extent of the land but also on the topographical lie of the land, which in Spain is generally mountainous.

Each group of workers names its delegate. The delegates meet every two days or every week with the councillor of agriculture and stock breeding, so as to co-ordinate all the different activities.

They decide for instance, whether certain fields should be ploughed, or whether they should attend to the wheat or the vines; or to prune the olive trees and other fruit trees; or to plant potatoes or sow beetroots, etc. According to the urgency and the importance of the work, groups are chosen to attend to it, and go, when necessary, from one zone to another.

In this new organization, small property has almost completely disappeared. In Aragon 75 per cent of small proprietors have voluntarily adhered to the new order of things. Those who refused have been respected. It is untrue to say that those who took part in the collectives were forced to do so. One cannot stress this point too strongly in face of the

calumnies which have been directed against the collectives on this point. It is so far from the truth that the agrarian collectivity has brought into force, everywhere, a special current account for small proprietors and has printed consumers' tickets specially for them, so as to assure for them the industrial products they require, in the same way as they do for the "collectivists".

In this transformation of property, one must put special stress on the practical sense and psychological finesse of the organizers who in almost all the villages have conceded or given to each family a bit of ground on which each peasant cultivates, for his own use, the vegetables which he prefers in the way he prefers. Their individual initiative can thereby be developed and satisfied.

New Methods of Cultivation	Collective work has made it possible to achieve in agriculture as well as in industry, a rationalization which was impossible under the regime of small land ownership and even under that of big landed properties. Tractors and other machinery are used where they are most necessary. Forgotten are the days when the means of production remained unused in the barns of the rich, whilst the poor peasant worked the land with roman ploughs drawn by worn out donkeys
----------------------------------	--

and mules! Beasts of burden are equally used on work to which they are most suited. All the strong mules do the hard work whilst the weaker ones are put on less arduous tasks.

On the other hand, better quality seeds are used. This was rendered possible by being able to buy up large stocks, which the small peasant could not afford to do in the past. Potato seeds come from Ireland and selected wheat seeds only are used. Chemical fertilizers have also been used. As modern machinery properly used - tractors and modern ploughs were obtained by exchange or bought directly from abroad - permits the soil to be more deeply worked, these seeds have produced a yield per hectare far superior to that which would have been obtained under the conditions which existed during previous years.

These new methods have also made it possible to increase the acreage sown. In Aragon my research on the spot permits me to affirm that generally speaking the increase in wheat crop has reached an average of 30 per cent. An increase in yield, though in a smaller proportion, has been obtained for other cereals, potatoes, sugar beet, lucerne, etc.

Family
Wage

This latter fact is of utmost importance.
It is the first time in modern society
that the anarchist principle "to each
according to his needs" has been practised.

It has been applied in two ways: without money in many villages in Aragon and by a local money in others, and in the greater part of collectives established in other regions. The family wage is paid with this money and it varies according to the number of members in each family. A household in which the man and his wife both work because they have no children receives, for the sake of argument, say 5 pesetas a day. Another household in which only the man works, as his wife has to care for two, three or four children, receives six, seven or eight pesetas respectively. It is the "needs" and not only the "production" taken in the strictly economic sense which control the wage scale or that of the distribution of products where wages do not exist.

Mutual
Aid

This principle of justice is continually extended. It does away with charity and begging and the special budgets for the indigent. There are no more destitutes.

Those who work do so for others in the same way as others will work to help them and their children later on.

But this mutual aid extends beyond the villages. Before the Fascist invaders destroyed the Aragon collectives, the cantonal federations did all in their power to counteract the injustices of nature by obtaining for the less favoured villages the machinery, mules, seed, etc., which were to help them increase the yield of their land. These implements were obtained through the intermediary of the Federation which undertook the delivery of the produce of twenty, thirty, forty or even fifty localities and asked in their name, for the industrial and stock breeding centres, for the products which they required.

* * *

All I have said in this synopsis should be sufficient for an understanding of the moral side of the revolution in Spain and justifies my statement, namely, that NEVER HAS ANYTHING SIMILAR BEEN ACHIEVED IN THE HISTORY OF CIVILIZED SOCIETIES.

But there are other aspects which deserve a little of our attention:

Education

Let us take education as an example. Wherever the revolution has been far reaching, serious efforts in this direction are noted.

Schools have been created in convents and in seminaries which generally were the best buildings. They can be counted by the thousand. Each of the five hundred collectives in Levant has its own school, generally in beautiful surroundings, in orange groves or at the foot of snow covered mountains.

In Aragon, Catalonia and Castille, everywhere one notices the same attention to education. Never before had such a great stride forward been made in the history of Spain.

Wherever the Government and the State have not been able to make themselves felt, medical aid has been socialized too, that is to say, put at everyone's disposal. The doctor looks after all sick people. The Collective pays him. The latter also provides all medicines, and sends the more seriously affected patients to the cities' hospitals or sanatoriums. Small dispensaries have been set up in certain villages and are maintained by the canton's efforts. No one is allowed to

die or sicken for lack of care and attention.

In almost all the collectivized villages of Aragon "Homes for the Aged" were founded to which came the old people of both sexes who were without family. The best houses were chosen for them, they were looked after by young girls chosen for their gaiety and pleasant appearance. No barrack regime, no annoying rules. The old folk came and went as they wished. They still continue in those places where fascist reaction has not triumphed.

But, apart from these examples of integral collectivization, there are examples of partial success which are worth reporting. In many places our comrades have entered the municipality and have succeeded in putting into practice appreciable reforms, such as the semi-municipalization of medical aid, which places at the disposal of all inhabitants the services of doctors, nurses and midwives and pharmaceutical necessities; the improvement of teaching; the municipalization of lodgings. The rent is paid to the municipality, and having need of no other revenue, this eliminates the payment of rates and taxes. One can understand what this means to the inhabitants who are not rich.

* * *

THE SPANISH REVOLUTION AND HISTORY

I have described on broad lines the new social organization created by the Spanish Revolution. The achievements of the libertarian socialists are a fact, and the excellence of their principles is definitely shown. About three million peasants, men women and children have succeeded in putting into practice this system of living with immediate results, without the lowering of production which these groupings of new regimes usually produce. At least two million have benefited from the partial achievements. A large section of industry has been successfully directed by the workers' syndicates; these figures must be judged in proportion to the twelve million inhabitants comprising permanent and refugee population in the Spain not under Franco domination. The obstacles met with in the towns are due to the application of a regime invented by governments whether of Catalonia or of Spain.

In this vast experiment, facts, characteristics, experiments, initiative and achievements of all sorts abound. I do not know if one day a historian will make a complete and impartial analysis. This

would be desirable. May these pages excite the interest of honest investigators and make clear to the English speaking proletariat what is to be learnt from this daring experiment in Spain, bleeding and at the point of death, to show the world the path to happiness and dignity.

-----oooOooo-----

PRINCIPLES OF THE COLLECTIVE

(Some conclusions on the Spanish collectives,
taken from the concluding chapter of
Gaston Leval's book "Ne Franco ne Stalin")

I want to call attention to a curious fact: the failure of the top, the directors, the guiding heads. I am referring not only to the socialist and communist politicians, but also to the better-known anarchist militants, the 'leaders'. Spanish anarchism had a number of them. The ablest, Orobón Fernandez, died shortly before the revolution. A real sociologist, he had a broad and profound grasp of politics and economics. Others were highly-cultured persons, fine agitators, some of them notable orators, good journalists and writers; Federica Montseny was one of the most intelligent women in the intellectual life of the country.

But from the start these militants were absorbed in the official duties they accepted despite their traditional repugnance to government. The idea

of anti-fascist unity had led them to this position: It was necessary to keep quiet about principles, to make temporary concessions. Hindered thereby from continuing to act as guides, they remained apart from the great work of reconstruction from which the proletariat will learn such precious lessons for the future. Without doubt they could still have given useful advice, they could have offered general principles for action and co-ordination. They did not. Why? It was because they were primarily demolishers. The struggle against State and capitalism had led them to subordinate all their culture and prestige to a political orientation. None of the best-known militants - apart from Noja Ruiz, and latterly Santillan - was competent to meet the economic problems of revolution. A constructive mentality, that can grasp the essentials of a chaotic situation and harmonize them in a comprehensive vision, is not improvised overnight.

Even some of the intellectuals who stayed out of official positions took no part in the work of transforming the society. How then was success possible? The reason was nothing else than the positive intelligence of the people. This was our secret strength.

For decades, anarchist papers and reviews and pamphlets had been forming in militants a habit of acting individually, of taking initiative. They were

not taught to wait for directions from above. They had always thought and acted for themselves - were not taught to wait for directives from above. They had always thought and acted for themselves - sometimes well, sometimes badly. Reading the paper, the review, the pamphlet, the book, each developed and enlarged his own personality. They were never given a dogma or a safe, uniform line of action. In the study of concrete problems, in the critique of economic and political ideas, clear ideas of revolution had gradually matured.

For some time, the problems of social reconstruction had been on the order of the day. Some of the better-known militants were rather scornful of the studies published by Puente, Besnard, Santillan, Orobon Fernandez, Noja Ruiz, Leval. But many of the more serious, and perhaps basically more intelligent, workers read them avidly. A great number of the 60,000 readers of the libertarian review Studi followed with interest the detailed articles on the problems a revolution faces, in food supply, fuel, or agriculture. Many syndicalist groupings did likewise. And when at the Saragossa Congress in May 1936, a renowned militant, who always displayed an olympian indifference towards such questions - later, he was just as good minister as bad organiser - presented an exposition of libertarian communism which revealed the lack of substance in his thought, the workers and peasants assembled from all the provinces showed

their disapproval; for they knew quite well that social life must be thought of and organized in a more methodical way. All this study, together with the need for men of will and action in the social struggle, gave birth to the qualities that made possible the marvellous achievements of the agrarian collectives and the industrial organization.

The capacity of the people. That is, intelligence plus will. This is the secret. In this, not even the humblest labourers were lacking. I knew many syndicalist committee members who understood the problems of revolution and economic organisation very clearly. They spoke intelligently about raw materials, imports, the need to improve or eliminate this or that branch of industry, the armed defence, and other matters. The prompt reaction against the Control Committees which threatened, in the big cities, to become a new parasitic bureaucracy; the rapid decision to resist the attacks of the 18th and 19th of July; the rise of untrained military leaders (Durruti, Ortiz, Mera, Ascaso and others) to command over professional military men, are all facts that support my conclusions.

When I made my first visit to the Aragon front, my attention was attracted by the countenances of many of the young men in the trenches. There was clarity, serenely, firmness in their eyes; they had the faces

of thoughtful men. I rode back to Barcelona with a comrade - the region's councillor for economics - who was going to Valencia to make a last desperate effort, through the central government, to save his companion, held by the fascists in Saragossa. He was a simple man, in externals and in character. But a remarkable man. Although tormented by the fate of his companion, he explained to me about the new lands that had to be cultivated, about coal and iron and manganese mines that could be opened, about canals that ought to be dug, about trade with Catalonia, about the relations between collectivist and individualist peasants.

We spoke of electrification. He expounded to me a plan for a single network to unify the hydraulic resources and distribute the power equally among the socialised regions, and avoid the concentration of industry and the excessive, often unfair, specialisation of agriculture. His deep knowledge of the Spanish economy surprised me. He was a glass-maker, only 32 years old. Many ministers of economics and agriculture of the republic and the monarchy knew less than he about ~~these~~ subjects.

One day the secretary of the Peasants' Federation of Levante said to me:

"I want your advice, Gaston. We've been thinking of starting a bank..."

"A bank of your own?" I asked.

"Yes. You see, we need money to keep things moving between our collectivised villages, and for trade with other towns. With the export of oranges stopped, it's hard to get. Instead of helping, the government cuts the ground from under us. We've just about decided to have a bank of our own. The problem is whether we ought to start one with our own resources, or take over one that already exists..."

"How would you take it over?"

"By operations to make it lose money and accept our intervention."

I didn't have time to look into the plan closely. Some months later, I saw this peasant again - this peasant with the common-man look and the beret. He'd got his bank.

I was working on economic problems so they consulted me about everything. But how often nothing remained to be done, so well had they already planned it!

The revolution developed in extremely complicated circumstances. Attacks from within and without had to be fought off. It took fantastic efforts to put the anarchist principles into practice. But in many places it was done. The organisers found out how

to get around everything. I repeat: it was possible because we had the intelligence of the people on our side. This is what finds the way, and meets the thousand needs of life and the revolution. It organised the militia and defeated fascism in the first phase of the war. It went to work instantly, to make armoured cars and rifles and guns. The initiative came from the people, above all from those influenced by the anarchists. For example the Aragon collectives: among their organisers I found only two lawyers, in Alcorina. They were not, strictly speaking, intellectuals. But if what they did together with the peasant and worker comrades, was well done, it was no better than what could be seen in Esplus, Binefar, Calanda and other collectives. What was a surprise was to find that a great many of these peasants were illiterate. But they had faith, practical common sense, the spirit of sacrifice, the will to create a new world.

I don't want to make a demagogic apology for ignorance. Those men had a mentality, a heart, a spirit, of a kind that education cannot give and official education often smothers. Spiritual culture is not always bookish, and still less academic. It can arise from the very conditions of living, and when it does, it is more dynamic. By adapting themselves to what was being done, by co-ordinating the work, by suggesting general directions, by warning a certain region of industry against particular errors, by complementing one activity with

another and harmonising the whole, by stimulating here and correcting there - in these ways great minds can undoubtedly be of immense service. In Spain they were lacking. It was not by the work of our intellectuals - more literary than sociological, more agitators than practical guides - that the future has been illuminated. And the peasants - libertarian or not - of Aragon, Levante, Castille, Estramadura, Andalusia, the workers of Catalonia, understood this and acted alone.

The intellectuals, by their ineptitude in practical work, were inferior to the peasants who made no political speeches but knew how to organise the new life. Not even the authors of the syndicalist health organisation in Catalonia were intellectuals. A Basque doctor with a will of iron, and a few comrades working in the hospitals, did everything. In other regions, talented professional men aided the movement. But there, too, the initiative came from below. Alcoy's industries, so well organised, were all managed by the workers, as were those of Elda and Castillon. In Carcagente, in Elda, in Granollers, in Binefar, in Jativa, in land transport, in marine transport, in the collectives of Castille, or in the semi-socialisation of Ripolls and Puigcerda - the militants at the bottom of everything.

As for the government, they were as inept in

organising the economy as in organising the war.

Principles and Lessons

1. In juridical principles the collectives were something entirely new. They were not syndicates, nor were they municipalities in any traditional sense: they did not even very closely resemble the municipalities of the Middle Ages. Of the two, however, they were closer to the communal than the syndicalist spirit. Often they might just as well have been called communities, as for example the one in Binefar was. The collective was an entity; within it, occupational and professional groups, public services, trade and municipal functions were subordinate and dependent. In forms of organisation, in internal functioning, and in their specialised activities, however, they were autonomous.

2. The agrarian collectives, despite their name, were to all intents and purposes libertarian communist organisations. They applied the rule "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs". Where money was abolished, a certain quantity of goods was assured to each person; where money was retained, each family received a wage determined by the number of members. Though the technique varied, the moral principle and the practical results were the same.

3. In the agrarian collectives solidarity was carried to extreme lengths. Not only was every person assured of the necessities, but the district federations increasingly adopted the principle of mutual aid on an inter-collective scale. For this purpose they created common reserves to help out villages less favoured by nature. In Castille special institutions for this purpose were created. In industry this practice seems to have begun in Hospitalet, on the Catalan railways, and was applied later in Alcoy. Had the political compromise not impeded open socialisation, the practices of mutual aid would have been much more generalised.

4. A conquest of enormous importance was the right of women to livelihood, regardless of occupation or function. In about half the agrarian collectives, women received less, apparently on the principle that they rarely lived alone.

5. The child's right to livelihood was also ungrudgingly recognised: not as a state charity, but as a right no one dreamed of denying. The schools were open to children to the age of 14 or 15 - the only guarantee that parents would not send their children to work sooner, and that education would really be universal.

6. In all the agrarian collectives of Aragon, Catalonia, Levante, Castille, Andalusia, and Estramadura,

the workers formed groups to divide the labour or the land; usually they were assigned to definite areas. Delegates elected by the work-groups met with the collective's delegate for agriculture to plan out the work. This typical organisation arose quite spontaneously, by local initiative.

7. In addition to these methods - and similar meetings of specialised groups - the collective as a whole met in a weekly or bi-weekly or monthly assembly. This too was a spontaneous innovation. The assembly reviewed the activities of the councillors it named, and discussed special cases and unforeseen problems. All inhabitants - men and women, producers and non-producers - took part in the discussion and decisions. In many cases the 'individualists' (non-collective members) had equal rights in the assembly.

8. In land cultivation the most significant advances were: the rapidly increased use of machinery and irrigation; greater diversification; and forestation. In stock-raising: the selection and multiplication of breeds; the adaptation of breeds to local conditions; and large-scale construction of collective stock barns.

9. Production and trade were brought into increasing harmony and distribution became more and more

unified; first district unification, then regional unification, and finally the creation of a national federation. The district (comarca) was the basis of trade. In exceptional cases an isolated commune managed its own, on authority of the district federation which kept an eye on the commune and could intervene if its trading practices were harmful to the general economy. In Aragon the Federation of Collectives, founded in January 1937, began to co-ordinate trade among the communes of the region, and to create a system of mutual aid. The tendency to unity became more distinct with the adoption of a single "producer's card" and a single "consumer's card" - which implied suppression of all money, local and national - by a decision of the February 1937 Congress. Co-ordination of trade with other regions, and abroad, improved steadily. When disparities in exchange, or exceptionally high prices, created surpluses, they were used by the Regional Federation to help the poorer collectives. Solidarity thus extended beyond the district.

10. Industrial concentration - the elimination of small workshops and uneconomic factories - was a characteristic feature of collectivisation both in the rural communes and in the cities. Labour was rationalised on the basis of social need - in Alcoy's industries and in those of Hospitalet, in Barcelona's municipal transport and in the Aragon collectives.

11. The first step toward socialisation was frequently the dividing up of large estates (as in the Segorbe and Granollers districts and a number of Aragon villages). In certain other cases the first step was to force the municipalities to grant immediate reforms (municipalisation of land-rent and of medicine in Elda, Benicarlo, Castellone, Alcaniz, Caspe, etc.).

12. Education advanced at an unprecedented pace. Most of the partly or wholly socialised collectives and municipalities built at least one school. By 1938, for example, every collective in the Levante Federation had its own school.

13. The number of collectives increased steadily. The movement originated and progressed swiftly in Aragon, conquered part of Catalonia, then moved on to Levante and later Castille. According to reliable testimony the accomplishments in Castille may indeed have surpassed Levante and Aragon. Estramadura and the part of Andalusia not conquered immediately by the fascists - especially the province of Jaen - also had their collectives. The character of the collectives varied of course with local conditions.

14. We lack exact figures on the total number of collectives in Spain. Based on the incomplete statistics of the Congress in Aragon in February 1937, and on

data gathered during my stay in this region, there were at least 400. In Levante in 1938 there were 500. To these must be added those of the other regions. The development and growth of the movement can be gauged from these figures: by February 1937 the District of Angues had 36 (figures given at the Congress). By June of the same year it had 57. In my investigation I found only two collectives which had failed: Boltona and Ainsa, in Northern Aragon.

15. Sometimes the collective was supplemented by other forms of socialisation. After I left Carcagente, trade was socialised. In Alcoy consumers co-operatives arose to round out the syndicalist organisation of production. There were other instances of the same kind.

16. The collectives were not created single-handed by the libertarian movement. Although their juridical principles were strictly anarchist, a great many collectives were created spontaneously by people remote from our movement ("libertarians" without being aware of it). Most of the Castille and Estramadura collectives were organised by Catholic and Socialist peasants; in some cases of course they may have been inspired by the propaganda of isolated anarchist militants. Although their organisation opposed the movement officially, many members of the U.G.T. entered

or organised collectives, as did republicans who sincerely wanted to achieve liberty and justice.

17. Small land-owners were respected. Their inclusion in the consumer's card system and in the collective trading, the resolutions taken in respect to them, all attest to this. There were just two restrictions: they could not have more land than they could cultivate, and they could not carry on private trade. Membership of the collective was voluntary: the 'individualists' joined only if and when they were persuaded of the advantages of working in common.

18. The chief obstacles to the collectives were:

- a). The existence of conservative strata, and parties and organisations representing them. Republicans of all factions, Socialists of left and right (Largo Caballero and Prieto), Stalinist Communists, and often the POUMists. (Before their expulsion from the Catalan government - the Generalidad - the POUMists were not a truly revolutionary party. They became so when driven into opposition. Even in June 1937, a manifesto distributed by the Aragon section of the POUM attacked the collectives.) The U.G.T. was the principal instrument of the various politicians.

- b) The opposition of certain small landowners (Catalan and Pyrenean peasants).
- c) The fear, even among some members of collectives, that the government would destroy the organizations once the war was over. Many who were not really reactionary, and many small landowners who would otherwise have joined the collectives, held back on this account.
- d) The open attack on the collectives: by which is not meant the obviously destructive acts of the Franco troops wherever they advanced. In Castille the attack on the Collectives was conducted, arms in hand, by Communist troops. In the Valencia region, there were battles in which even armoured cars took part. In the Huesca province the Karl Marx brigade persecuted the collectives. The Macia-Companys brigade did the same in Terual province. (But both always fled from combat with the fascists. The Karl Marx brigade always remained inactive, while our troops fought for Huesca and other important points; the Marxist troops reserved themselves for the rearguard. The second gave up Vivel del Rio and other coal regions of Utrillos without a fight. These soldiers, who ran in panic before a small attack that other forces easily contained, were intrepid

warriors against the unarmed peasants of the
collectives.)

19. In the work of creation, transformation and
socialisation, the peasant demonstrated a social
conscience much superior to that of the city worker.



FREEDOM BOOK SERVICE has a wide selection of books and pamphlets dealing with as many aspects of the struggle against authoritarianism and the building of alternatives as it can muster. Write for a list, and for specimen copies of the paper FREEDOM and the monthly magazine Anarchy, to the address below.

for further information on the struggle in Spain,
THE SPANISH LABYRINTH An Account of the Social
and Political Background of the Spanish Civil War.

(Which is just that) Available from FREEDOM
BOOK SERVICE, 84 E Whitechapel High Street,
London, E.1. England. Cost; 22/- (£1.10) \$2.45.

THE VILLAGE OF ALCORA

("A peasant experiment" is taken from
H. E. Kaminski's book 'Ceux de Barcelone'.)

The village of Alcora has established "libertarian communism". One must not think that this system corresponds to scientific theories. Libertarian communism in Alcora is the work of the peasants who completely ignore all economic laws. The form which they have given to their community corresponds more in reality to the ideas of the early Christians than to those of our industrial epoch. The peasants want to have "everything in common" and they think that the best way to achieve equality for all is to abolish money. In fact money does not circulate amongst them any longer. Everybody receives what he needs. From whom? From the Committee, of course.

It is however impossible to provide for five thousand people through a single centre of distribution. Shops still exist in Alcora where it is possible to get what is necessary as before. But those shops are only

distribution centres. They are the property of the whole village and the ex-owners do not make profits instead. The barber himself shaves only in exchange for a coupon. The coupons are distributed by the Committee. The principle according to which the needs of all the inhabitants will be satisfied is not perfectly put in practice as the coupons are distributed according to the idea that everybody has the same needs. There is no individual discrimination; the family alone is recognised as a unit. Only unmarried people are considered as individuals.

Each family and person living alone has received a card. It is punched each day at the place of work, which nobody can therefore leave. The coupons are distributed according to the card. And here lies the great weakness of the system: for the lack hitherto of any other standard they have had to resort to money to measure the work done. Everybody, workers, shopkeepers, doctors, receives for each day's work coupons to the value of five pesetas. On one side of the coupon the word bread is written; each coupon is worth one kilogram. But the other side of the coupon represents explicitly a counter-value in money. Nevertheless these coupons cannot be considered as bank-notes. They can only be exchanged against goods for consumption and in only a limited quantity. Even if the amount of coupons was greater it would be impossible to buy means

of production and so become a capitalist, even on a small scale, for only consumer goods are on sale. The means of production are owned by the community. The community is represented by the Committee, here called the Regional Committee. It has in its hands all the money of Alcora, about a hundred thousand pesetas. The Committee exchanges the village products against products which it does not possess, and when it cannot obtain them by exchange it buys them. But money is considered as an unavoidable evil, only to be used as long as the rest of the world will not follow the example of Alcora.

The Committee is the pater familias. It possesses everything, it directs everything, it deals with everything. Each special desire should be submitted to it. It is, in the last resort, the only judge. One may object that the members of the Committee run the risk of becoming bureaucrats or even dictators. The peasants have thought about that too. They have decided that the Committee should be changed at frequent intervals so that every member of the village should be a member for a certain period.

There is something moving about the ingenuity of all this organisation. It would be a mistake to see in it anything more than a peasant attempt to establish libertarian communism and unfair to criticise it too seriously. One must not forget that the agricultural

workers and even the shopkeepers of the village have lived very poorly up till now. Their needs are hardly differentiated. Before the revolution a piece of meat was a luxury for them; only a few intellectuals living among them wish for things beyond immediate necessities. The anarchist-communism of Alcora has taken its nature from the actual state of things. As a proof, one must observe that the family card puts the most oppressed human beings in Spain, the women, under the complete dependence of men.

What happens," I ask, "if somebody wants to go to the city for example?"

"It is very simple," someone replied. "He goes to the Committee and exchanges his coupons for money."

"Then one can exchange as many coupons as one wants for money?"

"Of course not."

These good people are rather surprised that I understand so slowly.

"But when can one have money then?"

"As often as you need. You have only to tell the Committee."

"The Committee examines the reasons then?"

"Of course."

I am a little terrified. This organisation seems to me to leave very little liberty in a "libertarian communist" regime. I try to find reasons for travelling that the Alcora Committee would accept. I do not find very much but I continue my questioning.

"If somebody has a fiancée outside the village will he get the money to go and see her?"

The peasant reassures me: he will get it.

"As often as he wants?"

"Thank God, he can still go from Alcora to see his fiancée every evening if he wants to."

"But if somebody wants to go to the city to go to the cinema. Is he given money?"

"Yes."

"As often as he wants to?"

The peasant begins to have doubts about my reason.

"On holidays, of course. There is no money for vice."

I talked to a young, intelligent-looking peasant, and having made friends with him, I took him to one side and said to him:

"If I proposed to give you some bread

coupons would you exchange them for money?"

My new friend thinks for a few moments and then says: "But you need bread too?"

"I don't like bread, I only like sweets. I would like to exchange all I earn for sweets."

The peasant understands the hypothesis very well, but he does not need to think very long; he starts laughing.

"It is quite simple! If you want sweets you should tell the Committee. We have enough sweets here. The Committee will give you a permit and you will go to the chemist and get them. In our village everybody receives what he needs."

After this answer I had to give up. These peasants no longer live in the capitalist system, neither from a moral nor a sentimental point of view. But did they ever live in it?

---oooOooo---

THE COLLECTIVISED INDUSTRIES

(Chapter Ten of Vernon Richards' book,
"Lessons of the Spanish Revolution".)

The problems confronting the revolutionary workers in industry were more complex than those facing the peasants. Too many factors were outside their control for the revolution in industry to be as thoroughgoing as that on the land.

The social upheaval that took place on July 19, 1936, did no more than change the peasant's status overnight. The large landowners had either fled or were in any case absentee landowners. From the point of view of the peasant this did not hamper him unduly in his ability to carry on, whereas the abandonment of the factories by the managers and large numbers of technicians was a serious obstacle to the resumption of efficient production in a short space of time. In the case of the peasant, the immediate problem created by the uprising was that the harvest had to be gathered on the large

estates as well as on the land which had not been deserted by the owners. From the economic point of view it was a favourable beginning to the social revolution. So far as the future was concerned increased production, and more modern methods of cultivation were the tasks of the peasant in the struggle against Franco. And with the exception of certain exportable goods, such as oranges, there was no real problem of markets.

How different instead was the situation in industry. Apart from the abandonment of the factories by key technicians, the problem had also to be faced that a large number of industries had become redundant because overnight important internal markets for Catalan industry had suddenly been cut off by Franco's army. Foreign markets for Spanish manufactures were not large at any time and these too were temporarily lost. Equally important, Spain's dependence on foreign raw materials to feed her industries became a serious problem when the sources of supply were temporarily cut off, and was further aggravated by the fact that when the raw materials could once more be obtained the funds were often not made available by the Central Government to the factories needing them because they were controlled by the workers. Most of Spain's war industry was located in territory occupied by Franco's forces, so that a further problem facing Catalonia was the necessity to create a war industry where none

existed. This involved the importing of special machinery, the retooling of whole factories and the training of workers to handle them. It also meant the creation of a chemical industry, and the manufacture of many articles which had never before been produced in Spain, such as cars and lorries which hitherto had only been assembled in Spain. Yet within the first year even this problem was successfully dealt with. These were, however, only some of the technical problems facing the revolutionary workers of Catalonia.

Politically, too, they were faced with opposition which used every weapon in its power to gain control over industry. This, in the end, the Central Government more or less succeeded in doing by the nationalisation of the war industries which by then represented the bulk of the industrial potential. As we have already indicated, such a situation was possible because, though the workers were in complete control of the factories, the Central Government controlled the gold with which to purchase abroad the raw materials without which Spanish industry is paralysed.

In the first days of the revolution, the workers simply seized those factories which had been abandoned and which were generally the largest in the region, and resumed production where possible under workers' control. In some factories all the workers drew a fixed weekly

wage, but in others the profits or income were shared out among the workers, an arrangement which is more equitable than that the factory owner should put them in his pocket, but which nevertheless was not compatible with the spirit of the revolution, which was to do away with bosses and shareholders and not increase their number by a kind of collective capitalism. As a result, wages fluctuated in different factories and even within the same industries. The prosperous factories with large stocks of raw material and modern equipment had therefore an unfair advantage over the uneconomical factory struggling to keep going on small stocks. Such a system exists in Russia where in the kolkhoses the daily rate paid to the workers is fixed in relation to the previous year's profits. And this figure is arrived at "by exactly the same calculations that would settle the amount of the dividends to be distributed among the shareholders, if the kolkhose were a capitalist concern" (Gide: Back from the U.S.S.R.). But fortunately in Spain the injustice of this form of collectivisation was recognised and combatted by the C.N.T. syndicates from the beginning.

The Collectivisation Decree of October 24, 1936, which "did no more than legalise a situation already created by the workers" according to Peirats (in La C.N.T. en la Revolucion Espanola, Vol. 1, p.379) has generally been hailed by the legalists among the

syndicalists as one of the achievements of the revolution. The more so since the Decree was the work of the Council-
lor for Economy in the Generalitat, Juan Fabregas, who
was also a member of the C.N.T. The purpose of the
decree may have been to legalise what was a fait accompli;
but it was also an attempt to prevent the further develop-
ment of the new revolutionary economy in Catalan industry.
In October, 1936, the experiment was still in its early
stages. Each industry, each factory and workshop had
its own particular problems to solve as well as the
general problem of industry's responsibility to the com-
munity as a whole and the part it had to play in the
struggle against Franco.

The collectivisation decree by limiting col-
lectivisation of industry to those enterprises employing
more than 100 workers excluded a very large section of
the working population from participation in the experi-
ment of workers' control. It was decreed that in all
privately owned factories a Workers' Control Committee
would be created to deal with the economic and social
rights of the workers employed on the one hand and ensure
the "strict discipline in carrying out work" on the other.
They would also do all in their power to increase pro-
duction by the "closest collaboration with the owner" who
would be obliged each year to present to the Control Com-
mittee a Balance Sheet and Minutes, which would then be
passed on to the General Councils of Industry. Thus

the Workers' Control Committee had many roles and many loyalties; and it seems that all had power except the producers!

But let us examine the situation in the collectivised industries, that is those employing more than 100 workers, or those employing less than 100 whose owners were "declared enemies" or had fled. Actually there was another category of industry which could come under the Collectivisation decree: "The Economic Council can also sanction the collectivisation of those other industries which, by reason of their importance to the national economy or for other reasons, it is considered desirable that they should be removed from the activities of private enterprise". We have quoted this sentence from Article 2 of the Decree because it clearly reveals that the ultimate authority in the new economy was not to be the syndicates but the Government of Catalonia; and that the direction and development of the economy was to rest in the hands of the politicians and economists. In this way workers' control would be reduced to but a shadow of the original objectives that the revolutionary workers had set for themselves when they took over the factories and workshops.

Management of collectivised enterprises was in the hands of a Council of Enterprises nominated by

the workers themselves, who would also decide the number of representatives on this Council. But the Council would also include a "controller" from the Generalitat (Catalan Government) nominated by the Economic Council "in agreement with the workers". Whereas in enterprises employing up to 500 workers or with a capital of less than a million pesetas, the manager is nominated by the Council of Enterprises, in larger factories and in those engaged on national defence the nomination of the manager must be approved by the Economic Council. Furthermore, the Council of Enterprises can be removed from office by the workers at a general meeting as well as by the General Council for Industry, in cases of manifest incompetence or resistance to the instructions given by the General Council (Article 20).

We must now explain the role of the General Council for Industry which has twice appeared in this bureaucratic maze, through which we are attempting to lead the reader. The General Council was composed of four representatives of the Council of Enterprises, eight representatives of the workers' organisations (C.N.T., U.G.T., etc.) and four technicians named by the Economic Council. The chairman at these Council meetings was a spokesman for the Economic Council of Catalonia. Article 25 deals with the role of the General Council which includes formulating a general programme of work for the Industry, orientating the

the Council of Enterprises in its tasks, and furthermore to undertake the regulation of total output of the industry, and unify production costs as far as possible to avoid competition; to study the general needs of industry, and of internal and foreign markets; to propose changes in methods of production, to negotiate banking and credit facilities, organise research laboratories, prepare statistics, etc. ... In a word, the General Council determined and carried out everything... except the actual work, which as is usual in all centralised systems was left to the workers! The powers of the General Council are revealed in Article 26 of the Decree which reads:

"The decisions taken by the General Council for Industry will be of an executive nature, having an obligatory character, and no Council of Enterprises or private enterprise will be able to refuse to carry them out under any pretext which shall not be fully justified. They will be able to appeal against these decisions only to the Councillor for Economy against whose ruling there can be no further appeal."

The picture of industrial organisation in Catalonia as contained in the Collectivisation Decree is now complete. Apart from the greater degree of

control by the workers over their working conditions than exists in nationalised industries, all the initiative and control has been transferred from the individual factories and workshops to the government offices in Barcelona. The fact of workers' representatives taking a prominent part in the Council of Enterprises, in the General Council of Industry and even in the Government does not make the structure of control any more democratic or less authoritarian. So long as the "representatives" have executive powers, then they cease to be representatives in the true sense of the word. And what is more when the economics of industry and the control of production and distribution are in the hands of the Executive, then effective workers' control is as impossible and illusory as the concept of governments being controlled by the governed, which so many Spanish syndicalists fondly cherished against all the evidence to the contrary.

Government interference from Barcelona and from Madrid succeeded in preventing the experiment of collectivisation of industry from developing to its limits. Nevertheless, there is enough evidence to show that given a free hand, that is by controlling the finances as well as occupying the factories, the Spanish workers, who showed a spirit of initiative and inventiveness and a deep sense of social responsibility, could have produced quite unexpected results. As it was, their achievements

in the social services - in which they did not so depend on government finances and raw materials and were much freer than industry from government blackmail - have been acknowledged by all observers of the Spanish scene in its earliest phases.

It speaks highly of their organising capacities and intelligence that the Catalan workers were able to take over the railways and resume services with a minimum of delay; that all transport services in Barcelona and its suburbs were reorganised under workers' control and functioned more efficiently than before; that public services under workers' control, such as telephones, gas and light, were functioning normally within 48 hours of the defeat of General Goded's attempted rising; that the bakers' collective of Barcelona saw to it that so long as they had the flour (and Barcelona's needs were an average of 3,000 sacks a day) the population would have the bread. And to this list could be added such examples as the Health Services created by the Syndicates which functioned throughout Spain; the schools started by the syndicalists in town and village in an effort to blot out the age-long scourge of illiteracy (47% of the total population); the radical steps taken to solve the problems of the aged and the infirm. The Spanish people were giving concrete proof that not only were they capable of taking responsibilities but that they also had a vision of society which was more humane, more equitable, more civilised than anything that politicians and governments anywhere could conceive or devise.

EXTRACT FROM AN INTERVIEW

"You will be sitting on top of a pile of ruins if you are victorious," said Van Paasen.

Durruti answered: "We have always lived in slums and holes in the wall. We will know how to accommodate ourselves for a time. For you must not forget, we can also build. It is we who built these palaces and cities here in Spain and in America and everywhere. We, the workers can build others to take their place. And better ones. We are not in the least afraid of ruins. We are going to inherit the earth. There is not the slightest doubt about that. The bourgeoisie might blast and ruin its own world before it leaves the stage of history. We carry a new world, here in our hearts. That world is growing this minute."

Anarchist guerilla, Buenaventura Durruti, being interviewed by Pierre Van Paasen in the Toronto Star, September, 1936.

If we are to erect monuments, it cannot be done by publishing or reading books or pamphlets. The only fitting monument to the work begun by our Spanish brothers and sisters and destroyed by Franco with the help of Hitler and Mussolini, is to build again, stronger by the knowledge of our fore-runners experiences.

To build their work again, but stronger.

January 1971

Black Dog Press. c/o 84a, Whitechapel High St., London E.I.